

Message Text

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22

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 ACDA-07 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 SAM-01 SSC-01 /089 W
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O R 160753Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1789

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7480

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: FRANGIE REORGANIZES LEBANESE CABINET

1. SUMMARY: IN SURPRISE ANNOUNCEMENT, PRESIDENT FRANGIE HAS MADE CAMILLE CHAMOUN ACTING PRIME MINISTER IN TEMPORARY ABSENCE OF RACHID KARAME AND DEPRIVED KARAME OF KEY MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS, WHILE KEEPING HIM IN CABINET. CHAMOUN, NOW VICE PRIME MINISTER (AND ACTING PRIME MINISTER) AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AS WELL AS INTERIOR AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, EMERGES AS KIND OF SUPER-MINISTER. ADDITION OF GREEK CATHOLIC GEORGES SKAFF (FINANCE) RESTORES CONFESSIONAL BALANCE TO CABINET IN ABSENCE OF PHILLIP TAQLA, WHO ABANDONED LEBANON SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. PURPOSE BEHIND FRANGIE/CHAMOUN "COUP DE THEATRE" NOT YET CLEAR, BUT IS PROBABLY IN SOME WAY DESIGNED TO ASSIST PERPETUATION OF THEIR POWER BEYOND SEP 2YGDUAR
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MJWARKQQSAPUIU BECYTMD PRBKIDENT. END SUMMARY.

2. IN TWO DECREES ISSUED LATE SEPTEMBER 15, PRESIDENT FRANGIE:

A) DEPRIVED PRIME MINISTER RACHID KARAME OF ALL THREE OF HIS PREVIOUS MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS, E.E., DEFENSE, FINANCE AND INFORMATION, PASSING THEM RESPECTIVELY TO CAMILLE CHAMOUN, GEORGES SKAFF, AND GHASSAN TUEINI.

B) MADE CAMILLE CHAMOUN VICE PRIME MINISTER AND ACTING PRIME MINISTER, "DURING THE ABSENCE OF THE APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER."

3. NEW LEBANESE CABINET, AS ANNOUNCED BY FRANGIE, IS AS FOLLOWS:

RACHID KARAME: PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, TOURISM, HOUSING AND COOPERATIVES.

CAMILLE CHAMOUN: VICE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE, INTERIOR.

GEORGES SKAFF: MINISTER OF FINANCE, ECONOMY AND COMMERCE, COMMUNICATIONS.

GHASSAN TUENI: MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, PETROLEUM AND INDUSTRY, INFORMATION.

ADEL OSSEIRAN: MINISTER OF JUSTICE, EDUCATION, PLANNING.

AMIR MAJID ARSLAN: MINISTER OF HEALTH, PUBLIC WORKS, TRANSPORTATION, HYDRO-ELECTRIC RESOURCES.

4. NEW CABINET MEMBER, GEORGES SKAFF, IS A GREEK CATHOLIC, BORN 1928 AT ZAHLE, STUDIED LAW AND POLITICAL SCIENCE AND HAS PURSUED JOURNALISTIC CAREER. HE IS EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF ARABIC-LANGUAGE DAILY AL-JARYDA AND FORMER EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF POLITICAL REVIEW AL-DYAR. HE IS COUSIN OF JOSEPH SKAFF, DEPUTY FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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ZAHLE AND FREQUENTLY MINISTER IN EARLIER GOVERNMENTS.

5. EVEN FRANGIE'S KFOUR FRONT ALLIES SEEM TO HAVE BEEN CAUGHT BY SURPRISE. PHALANGE LEADER AMIN GEMAYEL IN BEIRUT SAID "WE WERE NOT CONSULTED" AND HIS BROTHER BACHIR IN CAIRO SAID "FRANGIE IS POURING OIL ON THE FIRE."

6. COMMENT: FRANGIE HAS ATTEMPTED DEAL DOUBLE BLOW TO KARAME. HE HAS DEPRIVED KARAME OF HIS LEADING PORTFOLIOS, DEFENSE, FINANCE, INFORMATION, WHILE KEEPING HIM IN CABINET WITH MINOR PORTFOLIOS. AT SAME TIME, HE HAS MADE CHAMOUN BOTH VICE PRIME MINISTER AND ACTING PRIME MINISTER DURING KARAME'S CURRENT ABSENCE IN CAIRO. CONFESSIOAL BALANCE IS THEORETICALLY RESTORED TO CABINET BY APPOINTMENT OF A NEW GREEK CATHOLIC, SKAFF, IN LIEU OF FORMER MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PHILLIP TAQLA, WHO LEFT LEBANON SEVERAL MONTHS AGO.

7. FRANGIE MAY HAVE HAD SEVERAL REASONS FOR MAKING THE SURPRISE MOVE ONLY EIGHT DAYS BEFORE HIS MANDATE EXPIRES:

A) TO ENABLE HIM TO HOLD A CABINET MEETING, WITHOUT KARAME, TO MAKE SOME FINAL CHANGES THAT WILL STRENGTHEN POSITION OF HARD-LINE CHRISTIANS AS SARKIS TERM BEGINS;

B) TO PLACE CHAMOUN RATHER THAN KARAME AT HEAD OF MINISTRY OF DEFENSE.

IN ANY CASE, FRANGIE HAS ADDED CONFUSION TO AN ALREADY COMPLICATED SITUATION.
LANE

NOTE BY OC/T: PARA. 1 AS RECEIVED.CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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